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HOME ECONOMICS

BY ALICE P. NORTON

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I. THE HOME OF TO-DAY—SOME OF ITS FAILURES AND ITS NEED OF HELP

THE scientific study of society of the last few years has brought into prominence the home as a social factor. Every student of social conditions has seen in it the strategic point of society. One author states emphatically: "Almost every social ill may be traced directly or indirectly to failures of the family in the more or less remote past. However attempts at alleviation may be compelled to address themselves to other institutions, scientific social healing will aim to influence the individual by increasing the efficiency of the family."

That there is a lack of efficiency in the average home of to-day is almost as generally acknowledged. Other social institutions have been gradually assuming the work once performed by the home. Many of its occupations have been removed to the factory or the shop; the children are sent to school for their intellectual training, to the church for their religious instruction (if, indeed, they receive any); the care of the sick is given over to the nurse or to the hospital.

This relief from much of its work should have resulted in the better performance of the functions which are left. Instead, there has crept into the home a lessened feeling of responsibility, a tendency to delegate all its work to other agencies. A mother, putting her eight-year-old boy into school for the first time, said to the teacher, "I have made no effort to teach him obedience, for I knew he would learn that with you."

What is the part that the home should play in this complex organism that we call society? It must provide conditions for the most effective social living; and it must exercise the general control that is necessary to accomplish this.

One of the most essential factors in individual efficiency is health, not sought as an end in itself, but as a means to the highest moral and intellectual development; and for this the home is chiefly responsible. Public sanitation and school hygiene are important and necessary, but they can accomplish comparatively little if the conditions of food, clothing, and shelter are bad.

The home must provide shelter, with all that is implied by it—good sanitary conditions, cleanliness, clothing for the protection of the body. It must provide food to keep the human machine in the best running

order; it makes no difference where the food is cooked, whether in the house or out of it; the selection of food to be used, the regulation of the diet, and the setting of a standard for the preparation of the food are functions of the home. It is no more necessary that the garments should be sewed in the house than that the cloth should be woven and spun there, but the choosing of the clothing and its adaptation to the needs of the body are part of the family life.

Yet even on the physical side a great majority of our families are failing. It is not only in the city slums that we find dirt, and foul air, and poor food. The dirt in the homes of the well-to-do may not be so evident to the senses as that in the slums, but it may be as dangerous in kind. One has only to inspect a number of city apartments to realize that few understand the imperativeness of light and sunshine and air. Poorly selected, if not poorly prepared, food is almost as common in the homes of the rich as of the poor.

It is true that in the last few years there has been a marked increase of interest in these problems of the home. Clubs have chosen them as topics of study; associations have been formed to better conditions; yearly conferences are held in the interest of home life. Among parents themselves a large number are seeking for light on these problems, and are realizing that it is no longer sufficient, for instance, to provide food that is palatable, and presumably digestible, but that it is necessary to study the special needs of the child, of the adult, and of the aged, and to understand the relation of food to growth and to labor power.

On the other hand, many parents not only are lacking in any endeavor to solve the problems that present themselves, they simply do not see that there are any problems to be solved.

Both of these classes of parents need help. The first often find it very difficult to obtain the information necessary to enable them to plan and work intelligently. A large part of the reliable books are too technical to be useful to one without scientific training. An interpreter is needed. The second class are harder to help, for they need not only to be guided, but to be aroused to a sense of their own responsibility and their need of guidance.

Someone has said that society is divided into two classes, people to be worked with, and people to be worked for. It is always easier to work for, than with, those who are not earnestly seeking aid, and many attempts at helping the home have been in the line of doing its work for it. A more difficult, but more useful, task is to inspire the home to do its own work.

For the successful performance of this task the nurse who goes into the home has special opportunity. The mother who would resent the

suggestions of a teacher that her child was improperly clothed and fed, will take without offence the same suggestion made by the nurse who happens to be in her home. The very fact of sickness, and the consequent need of the nurse, tends to make her receptive, and the nurse's opinion carries weight because of her profession.

A nurse possessing tact and an understanding of the needs of the household, especially if to this be added some practical experience in the care of a home, might make almost any suggestions as to the care of the house, and the preparation of food, and general conditions of health without seeming in any way to intrude or to be officious. She will be regarded as the expert who has a right to be heard in these matters. In the many cases where the illness is not serious enough to absorb all the energy and time of the nurse this help could well be given. It is perhaps adding another burden of responsibility, but it affords opportunity for a distinct social service.

For even the most superficial observer can hardly fail to see that there are to-day many forces working to disintegrate the home; that it is losing its hold upon the children; that it is in need of help.

Anything, however little, that will tend to arouse it to its duty, and help it better to fulfil its obligations, will confer a benefit upon society.

(To be continued.)

SCHOOL-NURSE EXPERIMENT IN NEW YORK

By L. L. DOCK

THE Nurses' Settlement of New York is at present conducting the experiment—in coöperation with the Board of Health and the Board of Education—of introducing a trained nurse into the public school system to work in conjunction with the medical inspector of the Health Board who inspects and excludes cases of infectious troubles among the children. This work of the "school nurse" has been carried on successfully for some time in England, and has been written of fully in *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING*. Miss Honnor Morten's account of how she established this system in the London board schools appeared in the January, 1901, number, and since then items from the English journals showing the extension of the work of several District Nurses' Associations to similar service in the schools of other places have appeared in the Foreign Department of the *JOURNAL*.

Miss Wald, the head of the Nurses' Settlement, has always cherished